

**Citation:**

Kunkel, A. W., & Burleson, B. R. (1999). Assessing explanations for sex differences in emotional support: A test of the different cultures and skill specialization accounts. *Human Communication Research*, 25, 307-340.

**Published version:**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1999.tb00448.x>

**Abstract:**

Research documents sex differences in interpersonal behaviors, such as comforting and emotional support, with women consistently being more likely than men to engage in comforting behavior, to produce sophisticated comforting messages, to value comforting skills, and to select friends based on comforting skills. Explanations for these gender differences include the “different cultures account” and the “skill specialization account.” This research was designed to test these explanations by assessing contrasting predictions derived from each account. Participants completed questionnaires assessing the types of comforting messages perceived as most sensitive and effective, preferences for the sex of comfort providers, and priorities assigned to affective and instrumental goals in comforting contexts. The results indicated that men and women evaluated comforting messages similarly, preferred receiving emotional support from female providers, and had similar priorities in comforting contexts. These results are most consistent with the skill specialization account and provide virtually no support for the different cultures account.